

Access to Healthcare in Rural United States: Obstetric Health Outcomes for Women

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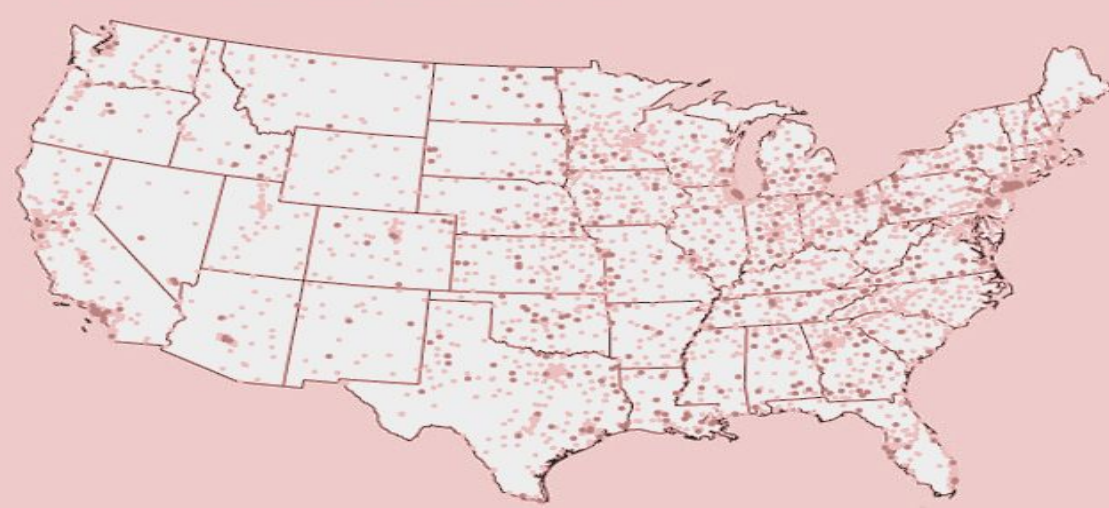
Background

- The closure of obstetric units in hospitals has slowly increased over the past decade
- There are less health care workers in rural areas as well as a greater amount of people that are eligible for Medicaid coverage through the federal government.
- Cutting obstetric programs from hospitals causes women to seek for obstetric care in a different location. This results in longer travel times and greater risk to the mother and the infant prior to giving birth.

Thinning Out

Nearly 500 hospitals around the nation have stopped offering birthing services since 2005, significantly increasing travel times for many.

- Hospitals offering birthing services in 2014
- Hospitals that stopped offering birthing services, 2005-14



Note: Alaska, Hawaii and U.S. territories not included to simplify analysis of neighboring hospitals.

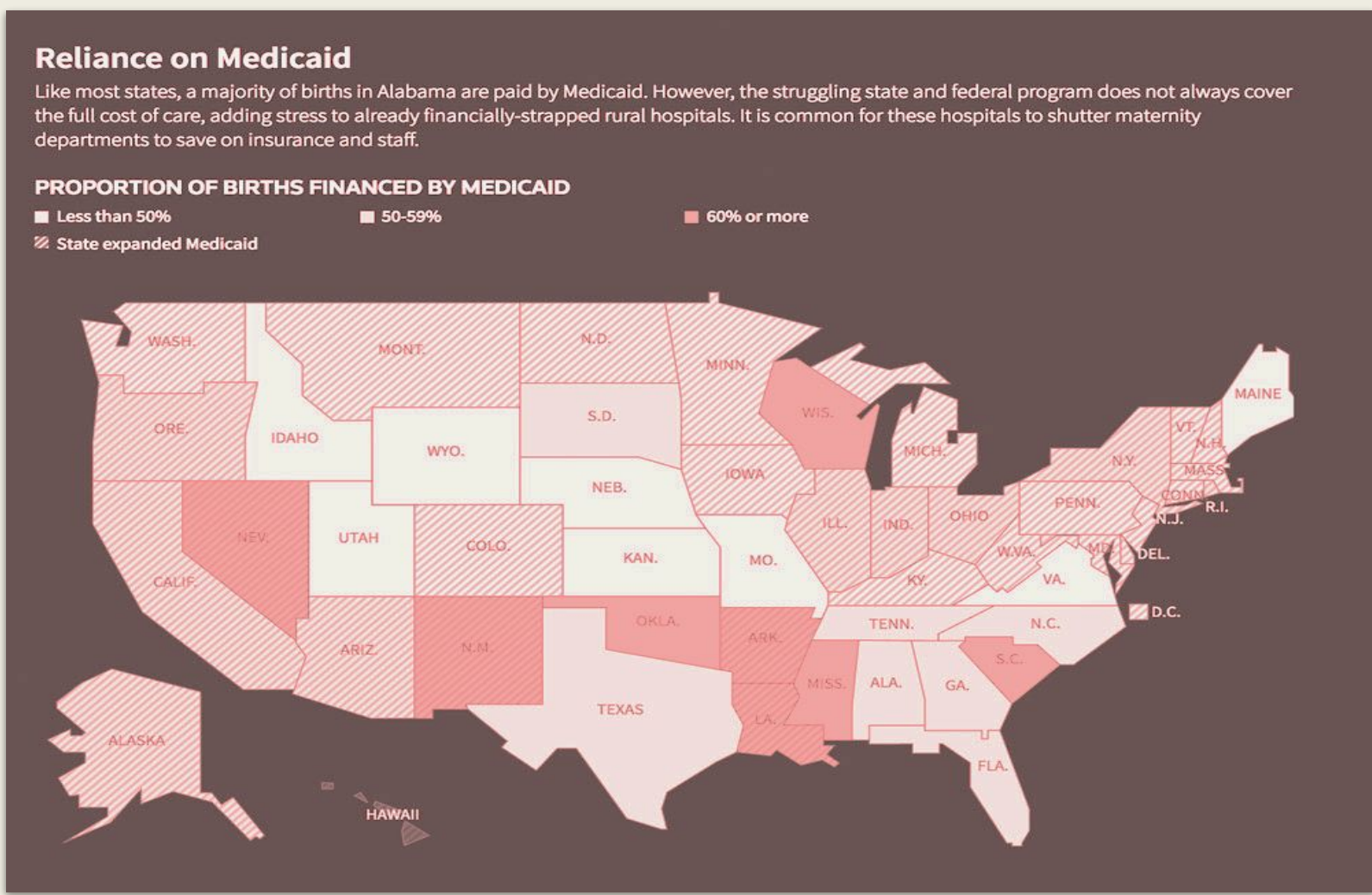
Source: WSJ analysis of Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services data

References

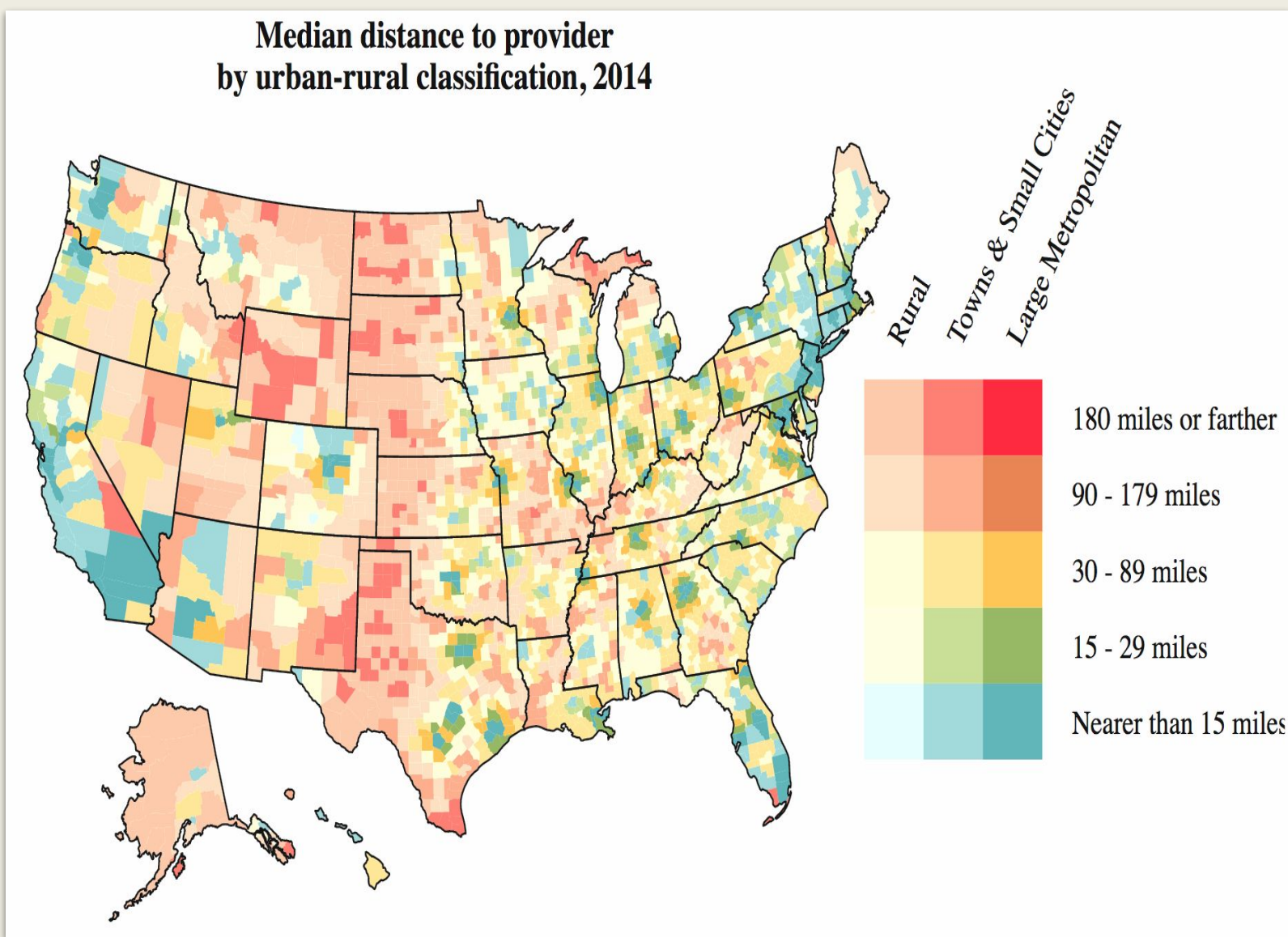
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Themes

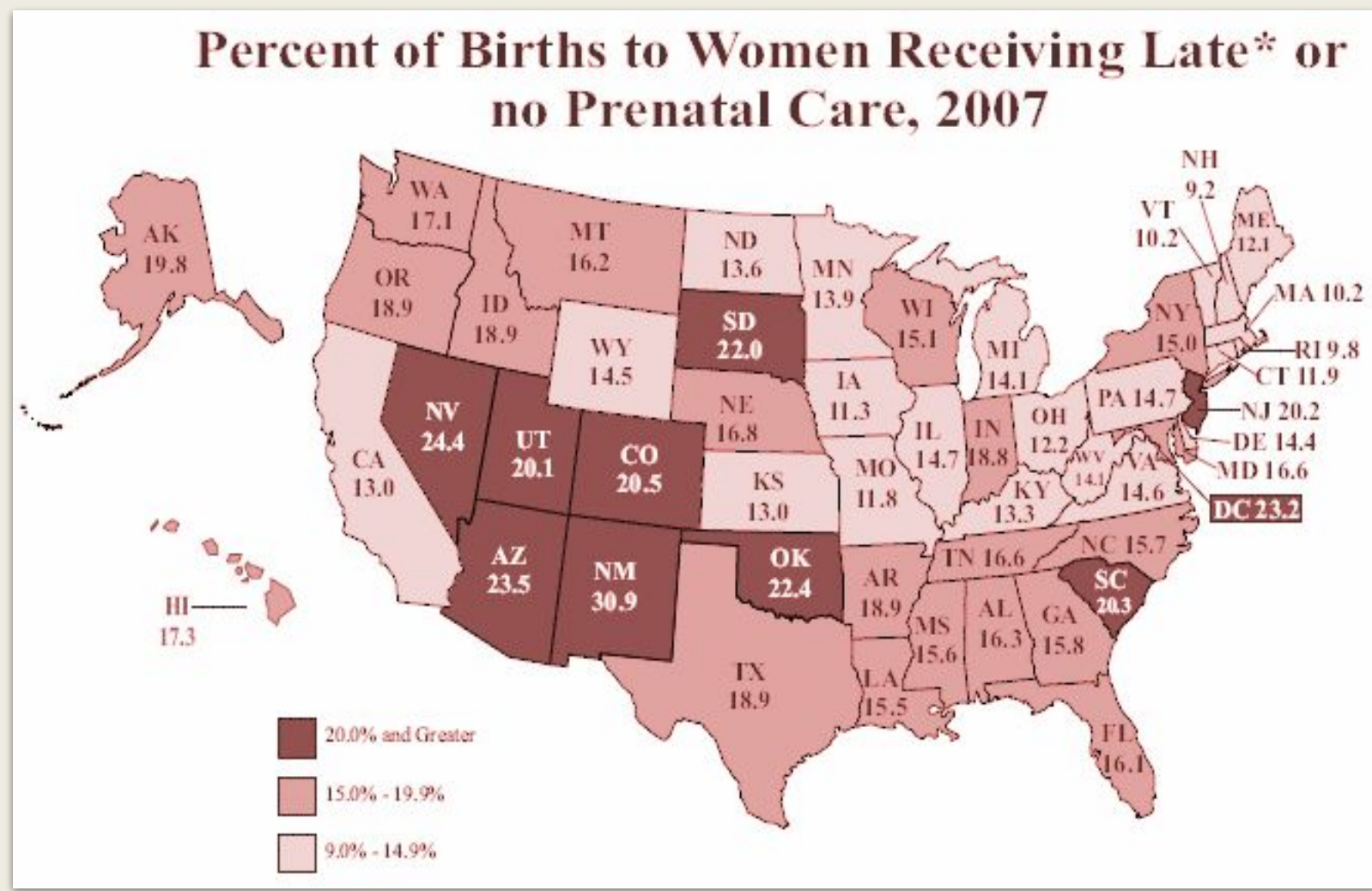
Preventative Obstetric Care



Abortion Access



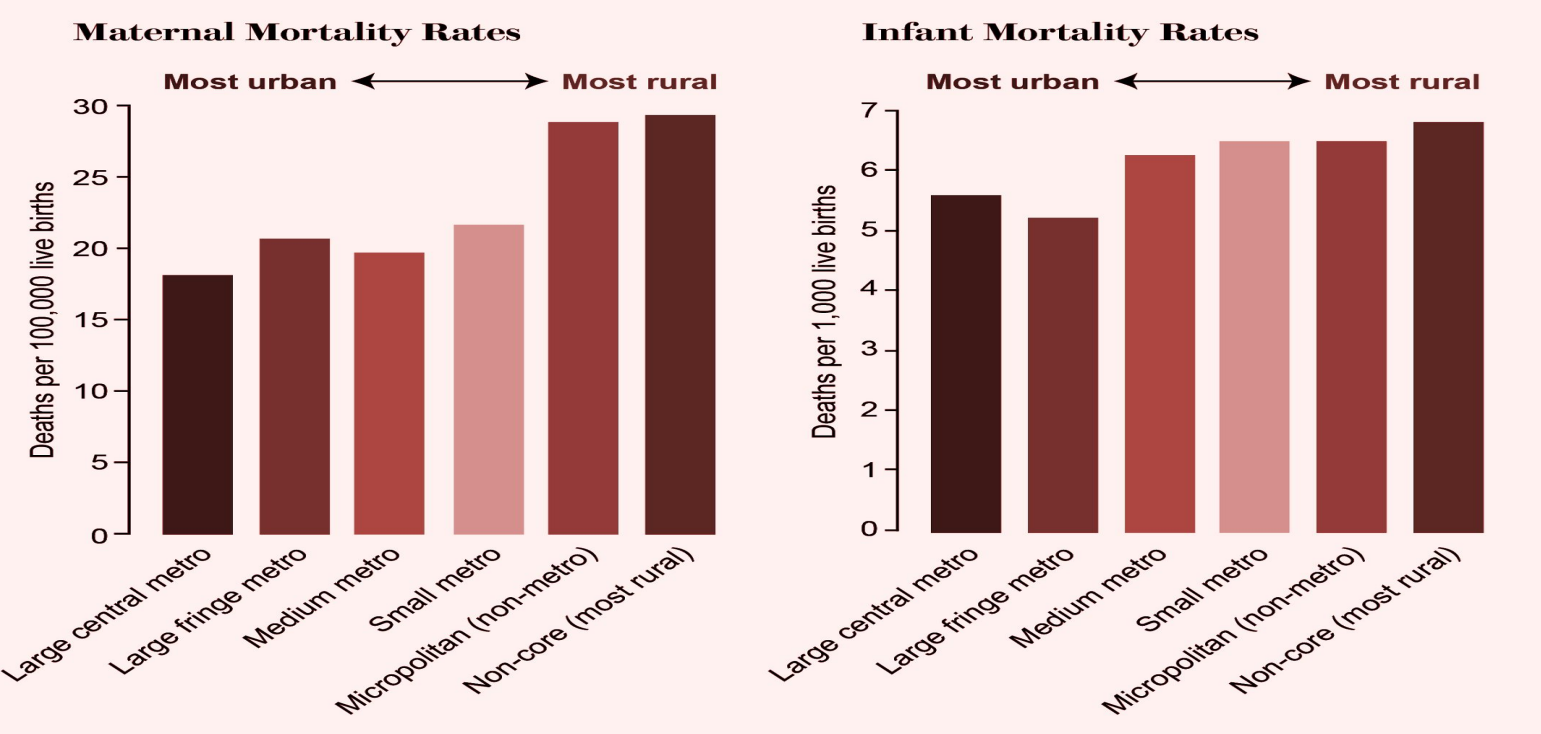
Prenatal Care



Birth Outcomes

Maternal and Infant Mortality Rates Are Highest in Rural America

According to publicly available data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention analyzed by *Scientific American*, women living in rural areas of the U.S. have significantly higher chances of dying from causes related to pregnancy or childbirth compared with their city-dwelling counterparts. Likewise, babies are more likely to die before their first birthday if they live in rural locations. The graphs below reflect 2015 data.



Recommendations

- Research and Collaboration
 - Determination of needs
 - Outcome Analysis
 - Training
- Midwives
 - Increased Autonomy
- Policy
 - Physician Incentives
 - Provider Access
 - Expansion of Care

Conclusion

- Maternal health outcomes are still a major public health problem in the United States. Resource poor areas, such as rural communities, carry a high proportion of these adverse health outcomes.
- The conversations about rural obstetric care needs to be happening at all levels of government. Women are going to continue having babies no matter where they live; the time to focus on safe and accessible practices is now.

